The Melville Society NEWSLETTER

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The annual meeting of the Melville Society took place Tuesday, December 27, in Room 426 of the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. About forty persons were present.

In a brief, informal business meeting preceding the program, President Bezanson reported for the secretary, who was absent, on the Society's accomplishments for the year. Luther Mansfield served as temporary treasurer and Howard C. Horsford as temporary secretary. The following officers were elected: Howard C. Horsford for a five-year term (ending December, 1959) as member of the executive committee; Tyrus Hillway for a three-year term (ending December, 1957) as secretary. The executive committee now consists of Harrison Hayford (term ends December, 1957, president for 1955), Nathalia Wright (term ends December, 1958), Howard C. Horsford, and Walter E. Bezanson (term ends December, 1956).

An offer by the trustees of the Berkshire Athenaeum of the Melville Room in Pittsfield to serve as official headquarters of the Society was discussed. The matter was referred to the executive committee for further study and action. The members expressed themselves as particularly interested in the development of the Athenaeum as a repository for books, articles, maps, charts, artifacts, and other materials relating to Melville.

Informal discussion during and after the meeting concerned the hope that a publications committee be reactivated (such a committee was partly responsible for collecting and editing the *Moby-Dick Centennial Essays* three years ago). Several members proposed the publication of a modest mimeograph pamphlet once or twice a year to carry bibliographical, critical, or explicational materials beyond the scope of the present Newsletter. It was also strongly urged that plans be considered (in connection with our next annual meeting) for a "content" program on the order of this year's program, open to the public and presented in the hotel in which the 1955 M. L. A. meetings take place. This question will be in the hands of President Hayford and the executive committee. Next year's annual meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held in Chicago.

MORNING MEETING

In supplementary talks, Wilson Heflin of the U. S. Naval Academy and Dr. H. L. Shapiro, chairman of the department of anthropology in the American Museum of Natural History, discussed aspects of Melville's career aboard the *Acushnet* and in the Marquesas Islands. From a study of the ship's records and of writings on life in the Marquesas, Heflin advanced three interesting hypotheses. First, one of Melville's reasons for jumping ship may have been disgust at the prospect of a very small "lay" for months of hard work, since the ship had had poor success in whaling. Secondly, there is reason to suppose that Melville and Greene were aided in their escape by a notorious beachcomber who regularly gave such aid to discontented sailors and then collected a fee from the next whaling captain who signed them on. No doubt the same person would have helped Melville in leaving the island. Finally, an examination of the island's geography, contemporaneous lists of native names, and the like would seem to suggest that Melville never actually spent his time in the valley of the Taipis at all but probably in another valley on the opposite side of the island.

Shapiro, from personal observation and professional knowledge of the area's anthropology, commented generally upon Melville's understanding (or lack of it!) of the language, customs, and traditions of the Marquesans. Distinguishing between the sharpness of Melville's observation and his frequent misinterpretation of what he saw, Shapiro noted instances of materials unique in Melville as apart from those garnered from other sources. At the end of his talk, he offered a brief comment on one of Heflin's ideas. From his personal knowledge of the island's geography and a study of Greene's independent report, he concludes that Melville actually was, if not in Taipi-Vai, at least in one of the neighboring valleys among one of the related tribes, all of whom in that section of the island were known as Taipis.

After the talks, Dr. Shapiro conducted the group to the ornithological section of the museum, where birds of the Marquesas Islands are displayed in a handsome case designed to provide a panorama of Taipi-Vai in miniature.

EVENING MEETING

About seventy-five persons, chiefly members of the M. L. A., attended the evening program in the Washington Room of the Statler hotel. Here the final half-hour sequence of the brilliant TV production of *Moby-Dick* by "Camera 3" (the last of six programs) was shown by Kinescope. It proved to be a moving performance, marked by splendid readings from the later chapters of the book. Stage action and props were minimized for maximum use of lights and shadows and careful placing of the readers. The focus was on the full eloquence of selected passages from Melville, read dramatically with musical backgrounds as the actors moved in and out of the set's chiaroscuro.

An informal panel discussion followed this presentation, with commentary by Robert Herridge, the producer; Frank Moriarity, the director; and James Macandrew, the program commentator. All three spoke of their long admiration for *Moby-Dick*. The production clearly was a labor of love. Herridge, who has written poems and stories for the *Atlantic* and other magazines, prepared the script after some twenty years of carrying the book about in his head and pocket. His aim, he said, was "to do as much justice as possible to the size, scope, and meaning of this work and to render Melville's epic narrative as truthfully as possible." His production without question was powerful, complex, and rich—a real contribution to Melville literature. (Members of the Society in the New York City area who are interested in TV as an art form will enjoy watching the imaginative programs that the Herridge-Moriarity team produces on "Camera 3" every Sunday.)

The Society is indebted to CBS-TV for its generosity in making and supplying the Kinescopic reproduction of the final sequence at a cost of $300, for allowing the production staff to discuss the project publicly, for providing the projector, operator, and screen, and for meeting other incidental costs. Several members of the audience inquired about the availability of the film for teaching purposes, and negotiations have been opened with the Columbia Broadcasting System by Walter E. Bezanson to determine whether it may be possible for the Society to secure a copy of the film for this purpose.

NOTES

The Princeton University Press announces the publication on February 14, of *Melville's Journal of a visit to Europe and the Levant, 1856-1857*, edited by Howard C. Horsford. $5.00.

Literary scholars interested in organizing a Whittier Society have recently written to the secretary for information about activities of our group. A quarterly publication is contemplated.

Published in 1954: A German translation of *Moby-Dick* by the Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft (Berlin). Translator, Richard Mummendey; illustrator, Herbert Pridohl.

A TRANSCENDENTALIST READER

References to *Typee* and *Omoo* appear in two books by Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, M. D., a now forgotten but once fairly prominent member of the Transcendental movement and a prolific contributor to the Transcendentalist press. In fact, Clarence Gohdes says of him (in *The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism*, p. 203) that in "number and extent the contributions of Lazarus [to the *Cincinnati Dial*] surpassed those of any other writer for the periodical save the editor [Moncure Conway] himself."

In the course of working up his peculiar development of the Swedenborgian-Emersonian doctrine of correspondences for his *Comparative Psychology and Universal Analogy*, Lazarus attacked the "missionary enterprise in the South Seas" because, although "undoubtedly commenced and sustained with the best intention," it had "proved one of the most deplorably pernicious facts in the history of man" and had "presided over the destruction of one of his finest races." His evidence (p. 127) is laconic: "See the first edition of *Melville's Typee*. The terrors of the church have suppressed it in the last."

The Human Trinity: or Three Aspects of Life: the Passional, the Intellectual, the Practical Sphere, by the same author, contains (pp. 116-117) a more or less accurate reference to Chapter LXIII of *Omoo*. Melville's long description of the dance of backsliding girls in the valley of Tamai is cited as an "[e]xample of harmonic movement by passional instinct, magnetic though not productive."

—Sidney Kaplan

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership is two dollars per year and includes all services of the Society. Associate membership (non-voting) is one dollar per year and includes all issues of the Newsletter. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, at Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.